

The Story of WAIT STILL BAXTER



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Kate Douglas Wiggin

KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN

Author of "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm"

CHAPTER XII.

Uncle Bart Discovers.

UNCLE BART and Cephas were taking their morning stroll under the Northend apple tree as Waitstill passed the join-

er's shop and went over the bridge. "Uncle Bart might somehow guess where I am going," she thought, "but even if he did he would never tell any one."

"Where's Waitstill bound this afternoon, I wonder?" drawled Cephas, rising to his feet and looking after the departing team. "That reminds me I'd better run up to Baxter's and see if anything's wanted before I open the store."

"If it makes any difference," said his father dryly as he filled his pipe, "Patty's over to Miss Day's spendin' the afternoon. Don't s'pose you want to call on the pig, do you? He's the only one to home."

Cephas made no remark, but gave his trousers a hitch, picked up a chip, opened his jackknife and, sitting down on the grassward, began idly whittling the bit of wood into shape.

"I kind o' wish you'd let me make the new ell two story, father. 'Twouldn't be much work; take it in slack time after hayin'."

"Land o' liberty! What do you want to do that for, Cephas? You 'bout pestered the life out o' me gittin' me to build the ell in the first place when we didn't need it no more'n a toad does a pocketbook. Then nothin' would do but you must paint it, though I shan't be able to have the main house painted for another year, so the old wine an' the new bottle side by side looks like the old driver an' makes us a laughin'stock to the village, an' now you want to change the thing into a two story! Never heard such a crazy idee in my life."

"I want to settle down," insisted Cephas doggedly.

"Well, settle—I'm willin'! I told you that afore you painted the ell. Ain't two rooms, 14 by 14, enough for you to settle down in? If they ain't, I guess your mother'd give you one o' the chambers in the main part."

"She would if I married Phoebe Day, but I don't want to marry Phoebe," argued Cephas. "And mother's gone and made a summer kitchen for herself out in the ell already. I bet yer she'll never move out if I should want to move in on a sudden."

"I told you you was takin' that risk when you cut a door through from the main part," said his father gently. "If you hadn't done that your mother would 'a' had to go round outside to get in the ell, and mebbe she'd 'a' stayed to home when it stormed, anyhow. Now your wife'll have her troopin' in an' out in an' out the whole 'durin' time."

"I only cut the door through to please mother, so's she'd favor my gittin' married, but I guessn't want to do no good. You see, father, what I was thinkin' of is a girl would mebbe jump at a two story, four roomed ell when she wouldn't look at a smaller place."

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Drink lots of water—you can't drink too much; also get from any pharmacist about four ounces of Jad Salts; take a tablespoonful in a glass of water before breakfast each morning for a few days and your kidneys will act fine. This famous salt is made from the acid of grapes and lemon juice, combined with lithia, and has been used for generations to clean and stimulate clogged kidneys; also to neutralize the acids in urine so it is no longer a source of irritation, thus ending bladder weakness.

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Harper House Pharmacy.—(Adv.)

ever he looked at it.

"You're right, father; 'tain't no use kickin' ag'in 'em," he said as he rose to his feet preparatory to opening the Baxter store. "When I said that 'bout trainin' up a girl to suit me, I kind o' forgot the one I've picked out. I'm considerin' several, but the one I favor most—well, I believe she'd fire up at the first sight o' trainin', and that's the gospel truth."

"Considerin' several, be you, Cephas?" laughed Uncle Bart. "Well, all I hope is that the one you favor most—the girl you've asked once a'ready—is considerin' you!"

Cephas went to the pump and, wetting a large handkerchief, put it in the crown of his straw hat and sauntered out into the burning heat of the open road between his father's shop and Deacon Baxter's store.

"I shan't ask her the next time till this hot spell's over," he thought, "and I won't do it in that dogasted old store ag'in, neither. I ain't so tongue-tied outdoors, an' I kind o' think I'd be more in the spirit of it after sundown some night after supper!"

Waitstill found a cool and shady place in which to hitch the old mare, loosening her checkrein and putting a sprig of alder in her headstall to assist her in brushing off the flies.

One could reach the Boynton house only by going up a long grassy lane that led from the high road. It was a lonely place and Aaron Boynton had bought it when he moved from Saco simply because he secured it at a remarkable bargain, the owner having lost his wife and gone to live in Massachusetts. Ivory would have sold it long ago had circumstances been different, for it was at too great a distance from the schoolhouse and from Lawyer Wilson's office to be at all convenient, but he dreaded to remove his mother from the environment to which she was accustomed and doubted very much whether she would be able to care for a house to which she had not been wonted before her mind became affected.

Here in this safe, secluded corner, amid familiar and thoroughly known conditions, she moved placidly about her daily tasks, performing them with the same care and precision that she had used from the beginning of her married life. All the heavy work was done for her by Ivory and Rodman; the boy in particular being the fleetest of helpers; washing dishes, sweeping and dusting, laying the table as deftly and quietly as a girl. Mrs. Boynton made her own simple dresses of gray calico in summer, or dark linsey-woolsey in winter by the same pattern that she had used when she first came to Edgewood; in fact, there were positively no external changes anywhere to be seen, tragic and terrible as had been those that had wrought havoc in her mind.

Waitstill's heart beat faster as she neared the Boynton house. She had never so much as seen Ivory's mother for years. How would she be met? Who would begin the conversation and what direction would it take? What if Mrs. Boynton should refuse to talk to her at all? She walked slowly along the lane until she saw a slender, gray-clad figure stooping over a flower bed in front of the cottage. The woman raised her head with a fawn-like gesture that had something in it of timidity rather than fear, picked some loose bits of green from the ground, and, quietly turning her back upon the on-



"Waitstill! Does Ivory know you?" the coming stranger, disappeared through the open front door.

There could be no retreat on her own part now, thought Waitstill. She wished for a moment that she had made this first visit under Ivory's protection, but her idea had been to gain Mrs. Boynton's confidence and have a quiet friendly talk, such a one as would be impossible in the presence of a third person. Approaching the steps, she called through the doorway in her clear voice: "Ivory asked me to come and see you one day, Mrs. Boynton. I am Waitstill Baxter, the little girl on Town House hill that you used to know."

Mrs. Boynton came from an inner room and stood on the threshold. The name "Waitstill" had always had a charm for her ears, from the time she first heard it years ago until it fell from Ivory's lips this summer, and again it caught her fancy.

"Waitstill," she repeated softly. "Waitstill! Does Ivory know you?" "We've known each other for ever so long—ever since we went to the brick school together when we were boys and girls. And when I was a child my stepmother brought me over here once on an errand, and Ivory showed me a humming bird's nest in that lilac bush by the door."

Mrs. Boynton smiled. "Come and look!" she whispered. "There is always a humming bird's nest in our lilac. How did you remember?"

The two women approached the bush, and Mrs. Boynton carefully parted the leaves to show the dainty morsel of a home thatched with soft gray green and lined with down. "The birds have flown now," she said. "They were like little jewels when they darted off in the sunshine."

Her voice was faint and sweet, as if it came from far away, and her eyes looked not as if they were seeing you, but seeing something through you. Her pale hair was turned back from her paler face, where the veins showed like blue rivers, and her smile was like the fitting of a moonbeam. She was standing very close to Waitstill, closer than she had been to any woman for many years, and she studied her a little, wistfully yet courteously, as if her attention was attracted by something fresh and winning. She looked at the color ebbing and flowing in the girl's cheeks, at her brows and lashes, at her neck as white as swansdown.

CHAPTER XIII.

Ivory's Mother.

"I HAD a daughter once," she said. "My second baby was a girl, but she lived only a few weeks. I need her very much, for I am a great care to Ivory. He is son and daughter both, now that Mr. Boynton is away from home. You did not see any one in the road as you turned in from the bars, I suppose?"

"No," answered Waitstill, surprised and confused, "but I didn't really notice. I was thinking of a cool place for my horse to stand."

"I sit out here in these warm afternoons," Mrs. Boynton continued, shading her eyes and looking across the fields, "because I can see so far down the lane. I have the supper table set for my husband already, and there is a surprise for him, a saucer of wild strawberries I picked for him this morning. If he does not come I always take away the plate and cup before Ivory gets here. It seems to make him unhappy."

"He doesn't like it when you are disappointed, I suppose," Waitstill ventured. "I have brought my knitting, Mrs. Boynton, so that I needn't keep you idle if you wish to work. May I sit down a few minutes? And here is a cottage cheese for Ivory and Rodman and a jar of plums for you preserved from my own garden."

Mrs. Boynton's eyes searched the face of the visitor from the world she had almost forgotten and, finding nothing but tenderness there, said, with just a trace of bewilderment: "Thank you. Yes, do sit down. My work-basket is just inside the door. Take that rocking chair. I don't have another one out here because I have never been in the habit of seeing visitors."

"I hope I am not intruding," stammered Waitstill, seating herself and beginning her knitting to see if it would lessen the sense of strain between them.

"Not at all. I always loved young and beautiful people, and so did my husband. If he comes while you are here do not go away, but sit with him while I get his supper. If Elder Cochran should be with him you would see two wonderful folk. Of ten at night, too, I am in sore trouble about something else, something I have never told Ivory, the first thing I have ever hidden from my dear son, but I think I could tell you if only I could be sure about it."

"Tell me if it will help you. I will try to understand," said Waitstill brokenly.

"Ivory says Rodman is the child of my dead sister. Some one must have told him so. Could it have been I? It haunts me day and night, for unless I am remembering wrong again I never had a sister. I can call to mind neither sister nor brother."

"You went to New Hampshire one winter," Waitstill reminded her gently, as if she were talking to a child. "It was bitter cold for you to take such a hard journey. Your sister died and you brought her little boy, Rodman, back, but you were so ill that a stranger had to take care of you on the stagecoach and drive you to Edgewood next day in his own sleigh. It is no wonder you have forgotten something of what happened, for Dr. Perry hardly brought you through the brain fever that followed that journey."

"I seem to think now that it is not so," said Mrs. Boynton, opening her eyes and looking at Waitstill despairingly. "I must grope and grope in the dark until I find out what is true and then tell Ivory. God will punish false speaking! His heart is closed against lies and evildoing!"

"He will never punish you if your tired mind remembers wrong," said Waitstill. "He knows, none better, how you have tried to find him and hold him through many a tangled path. I will come as often as I can, and we will try to frighten away these worrying thoughts."

"If you will only come now and then and hold my hand," said Ivory's mother, "hold my hand so that your strength will flow into my weakness, perhaps I shall puzzle it all out and God will bless me to remember right before I die."

"Everything that I have power to give away shall be given to you," promised Waitstill. "Now that I know you and you trust me you shall never be left so alone again—not for long, at any rate. When I stay away you will remember that I cannot help it, won't you?"

"Yes, I shall think of you till I see you again. I shall watch the long lane more than ever now. Ivory sometimes takes the path across the fields, but my dear husband will come by the old

own mother, if I could, I should be so glad."

Waitstill stood a head higher than Ivory's mother, and the glowing light of her, the steadiness of her voice, the warmth of her handclasp must have made her seem like a strong refuge to this storm tossed derelict. The deep furrow between Lois Boynton's eyes relaxed a trifle, the blood in her veins ran a little more swiftly under the touch of the young hand that held hers so closely. Suddenly a light came into her face and her lip quivered.

"Perhaps I have been remembering wrong all these years," she said. "It is my great trouble, remembering wrong. Perhaps my baby did not die as I thought; perhaps she lived and grew up; perhaps—her pale cheek burned and her eyes shone like stars—perhaps she has come back!"

Waitstill could not speak. She put her arm round the trembling figure, holding her as she was wont to hold Patty and with the same protective instinct. The embrace was electric in its effect and set altogether new currents of emotion in circulation. Something in Lois Boynton's perturbed mind seemed to beat its wings against the barriers that had hitherto opposed it and, freeing itself, mounted into clearer air and went singing to the sky. She rested her cheek on the girl's breast with a little sob. "Oh, let me go on remembering wrong!" she sighed from that safe shelter. "Let me go on remembering wrong! It makes me so happy!"

Waitstill gently led her to the rocking chair and sat down beside her on the lowest step, stroking her thin hand. Mrs. Boynton's eyes were closed, her breath came and went quickly, but presently she began to speak hurriedly as if she were relieving a surcharged heart.

"There is something troubling me," she began, "and it would ease my mind if I could tell it to some one who could help. Your hand is so warm and so



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firm! Oh, hold mine closely and let me draw in strength as long as you can spare it! It is flowing, flowing from your hand into mine, flowing like wine. My thoughts at night are not like my thoughts by day these last weeks. I wake suddenly and feel that my husband has been away a long time and will never come back. Of ten at night, too, I am in sore trouble about something else, something I have never told Ivory, the first thing I have ever hidden from my dear son, but I think I could tell you if only I could be sure about it."

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road, and now there will be you to look for!"

At the Baxters the late supper was over, and the girls had not sat at the table with their father, having eaten earlier by themselves. The hired man had gone home to sleep. Patty had retired to the solitude of her bedroom almost at dusk, a'we worn out with the heat, and Waitstill sat under the peach tree in the corner of her own little garden, tating and thinking of her interview with Ivory's mother. She sat there until nearly 8 o'clock, trying vainly to put together the puzzling details of Lois Boynton's conversation, wondering whether the perplexities that vexed her mind were real or fancied, but warmed to the heart by the affection that the older woman seemed instinctively to feel for her. "She did not know me, yet she cared for me at once," thought Waitstill tenderly and proudly, "and I for her, too, at the first glance."

She heard her father lock the barn and shed and knew that he would be going upstairs immediately, so she quickly went through the side yard and lifted the latch of the kitchen door. It was fastened. She went to the front door, and that, too, was bolted, although it had been standing open all the evening so that if a breeze should spring up it might blow through the house. Her father supposed, of course, that she was in bed, and she dreaded to bring him downstairs for fear of his anger. Still there was no help for it, and she rapped smartly at the side door. There was no answer, and she rapped again, vexed with her own carelessness. Patty's face appeared promptly behind her screen of mosquito netting in the second story, but before she could exchange a word with her sister Deacon Baxter opened the blinds of his bedroom window and put his head out.

"You can try sleepin' outdoors or in the barn tonight," he called. "I didn't say anything to you at supper time, because I wanted to see where you was intendin' to prowls this evenin'!"

"I haven't been 'prowling' anywhere, father," answered Waitstill. "I've been out in the garden cooling off. It's only 8 o'clock."

"Well, you can cool off some more," he shouted, his temper now fully aroused, "or go back where you was this afternoon and see if they'll take you in there! I know all about your deceitful tricks. I come home to grind the scythes and found the house and barn empty. Cephas said you'd driven up Saco hill and I took his horse and followed you and saw where you went. Long's you couldn't have a feller callin' on you here to home you thought you'd call on him, did yer, you boldfaced hussy?"

"I am nothing of the sort," the girl answered him quietly. "Ivory Boynton was not at his house. He was in the hayfield. You know it, and you know that I knew it. I want to see a sick, unhappy woman who has no neighbors. I ought to have gone long

before. I am not ashamed of it, and I don't regret it. If you ask unreasonable things of me you must expect to be disobeyed once in awhile."

"Must expect to be disobeyed, must?" the old man cried, his face positively terrifying in its ugliness. "We'll see about that. If you wa'n't callin' on a young man you were callin' on a crazy woman, and I won't have it, I tell you, do you hear? I won't have a daughter o' mine consortin' with any o' that Boynton crew. Perhaps a night outdoors will teach you who's master in this house, you impudent, shameless girl! We'll try it anyway!" And with that he banged down the window and disappeared, gibbering and jabbering impotent words that she could hear, but not understand.

(To Be Continued Next Saturday.)

Inflammatory Rheumatism Quickly Relieved.

Morton L. Hill of Lebanon, Ind., says: "My wife had inflammatory rheumatism in every muscle and joint; her suffering was terrible and her body and face were swollen all most beyond recognition; had been in bed for six weeks and had eight physicians, but received no benefit until she tried Dr. Detchem's Relief for Rheumatism. It gave immediate relief and she was able to walk in three days. I am sure it saved her life," said Otto Grotjan, 1501 Second avenue, Rock Island, and Gust Schlegel & Son, 220 Second street, Davenport.—(Adv.)

Andrew Kangstrom, a Swedish graduate student at Cornell, will lead an other assault on Mount McKinley next summer under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution.



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